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EDGEWISE

by Anne MacLaurin

Have you ever been to Xwixwyus? Or

Tth’umuqwa’? Or SK´ELT-ÁMEN?
We’re betting you’ve visited at least one
of them. They’re more commonly known as
Winter Cove (Saturna Island), Russell Island
(near Saltspring Island) and Sidney Spit (Sidney
Island) and they’re all Coast Salish ancestral
sites in what is now the Gulf Islands National
Park Reserve.
They’re sacred places that Parks Canada and
many Coast Salish communities are working
together to protect.
University of Victoria anthropologist Brian
Thom has long worked with Coast Salish First
Nations and Parks Canada on cooperative
management in the Gulf Islands National Park
Reserve. Recently, Thom saw an opportunity to
more fully integrate Indigenous knowledge and
cultural practices into co-management efforts.
“Mapping culturally significant landscapes
is an essential way to re-story this national
park reserve,” says Thom. “By documenting
Indigenous landmarks, traditional use sites
and stories, Coast Salish communities have a
powerful tool for collaboratively managing their
territories with Parks Canada.”

This fall, Thom organized a series of field
mapping excursions to the park reserve with
his fourth-year anthropology students. Coast
Salish Elders and knowledge-holders shared
oral histories with the students who used
Google’s MyMaps, GPS and audio recorders
to document culturally significant landscapes.
“By experiencing first-hand the procesnts.